



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery Resource Assessment Group (ScallopRAG) Meeting 35

Meeting minutes

Teleconference

11 May 2020

11:03-14:11

The Chair opened the meeting at 11.03 am

Agenda item 1 Preliminaries

1.1 Welcome and apologise

Professor Brendan Kelaher, the Chair, welcomed members and observers to the meeting and made an Acknowledgement of Country statement recognising the Traditional Owners of the many lands in which we met and payed respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Attendees	Membership
Brendan Kelaher	Chair
John Cull	Industry Member
Stuart Richey	Industry Member
Jayson Semmens	Scientific Member
Nic Marton	Scientific Member
Mervi Kangas	Scientific Member
Julian Morison	Economic Member
Daniel Corrie	AFMA Member
Heather Johnston	Executive Officer
Matt Koopman	Observer, Fishwell Consulting
Andrew Sullivan	Invited participant, Industry

1.2 Declarations of interest

ScallopRAG (the RAG) members followed the conflict of interest declarations as outlined in [Fisheries Administration Paper 12](#). Members and participants reviewed and updated the Declarations of Interest included at [Attachment A](#)

John Cull, Stuart Richey and Andrew Sullivan declared a potential conflict with [agenda item 4](#) '2020 TAC, Closures and season dates recommendations'. Mr Cull, Mr Richey and Mr Sullivan left the meeting while the RAG considered their interests and how they should be managed. The RAG decided they could be part of the discussion, but should not participate in forming any RAG recommendations for agenda item 4.

1.3 Adoption of agenda

The agenda at [Attachment B](#) was adopted by the RAG as final.

1.4 Actions arising from previous meetings

The RAG noted the actions items from previous meetings and the updates provided by the Executive Officer at [Attachment C](#).

Agenda item 2 - Summary of information available for scallop beds surveyed

Dr Koopman from Fishwell Consulting presented a summary of information available from previous biomass surveys for Bass Strait Central Zone Fishery (BSCZSF) Commercial scallop beds from 2015 to 2019. AFMA engaged Fishwell Consulting to prepare this report to assist the RAG with their recommendations for the 2020 fishing season management arrangements in the absence of the 2020 biomass survey, which was cancelled due to the logistical and work health and safety issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The RAG noted the following background from the report:

- The summary report is based on detailed information from the BSCZSF biomass surveys from 2015 to 2019.
- The number and location of beds surveyed each year have varied due to new beds being identified and changing priorities for which beds that are routinely surveyed.
- Scallop abundance within the swept area of a scallop bed (measured as biomass or density) are based on the catches obtained from the average of multiple fixed- duration randomised hauls using a standard dredge, assuming:
 - settlement of spat around King Island occurs between November to January;
 - from recruitment, *Pecten fumatus* reach about 70-80 mm in two years; and
 - a 33 per cent dredge efficiency for legal-sized scallops (85 mm).
- Within a scallop bed, estimates of biomass combined with the number and size-frequency of scallops can be used to estimate density, presented as either weight (kg /1000 m²) or a count (individuals / m²).
- Where available, results from surveys since 2015 were compiled to provide a time series of density (in weight and count), mean size, biomass, length frequency distribution, percent of scallops greater than 85 mm and percent composition of dead shell.
- Where more than two years of length frequency data was available, the data was used to predict the size of scallops in 2020, including confidence intervals, based on life-history characteristics of commercial scallops.

The RAG considered the results of the report and made the following key points:

- The King Island Blue Dot Extended (KIBDE) and JH beds both showed good signs of recruitment and it is likely that some of these recruits would have grown to spawning size since the last survey.
- A number of the surveyed beds are ageing, and the biomass and density of scallops is likely to have decreased in these beds since the last survey.
- It was hypothesised that the population dynamics of scallops in the Flinders Island bed may have shifted since 2010, with scallops growing to 85–90 mm and then dying off. This is possibly the result of seismic testing around that time.
- The Flinders Island bed should be closed for the 2020 season as it is the only known scallop bed in the eastern region of the fishery.
- Additional closures to protect recruitment is unlikely to have a significant impact on industry because they did not exclusively fish in the beds surveyed.

AFMA and the RAG thanked Dr Koopman for preparing the report, especially in such a short time frame.

Agenda item 5 - Other Business

The Bass Strait Scallop Industry Association (BSSIA) Executive officer, Andrew Sullivan, provided an update on Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) in-season data collection project.

The RAG noted the following:

- BSSIA have received preliminary approval from FRDC for a two year project, commencing mid-2020, aimed at building industry capacity to collect in-season data on scallops, including a biomass survey in-lieu of the 2020 pre-season biomass survey.
- A steering committee will be established for the project.
- BSSIA will seek guidance from the RAG on which beds to survey.

The RAG made the following key points:

- This project could be used as a platform for industry to collect data during the 2020 fishing season.
- The project will allow industry to demonstrate they are able to collect high quality data that can be used to inform management recommendations.
- Sampling towards the end of the fishing season, when the scallops are spawning, would be valuable as the pre-season survey is currently done when the scallops are going into condition and may not be an accurate representation of the fishery.
- Consideration should be given to how industry collected data can be built into the revision of the BSCZSF Harvest Strategy.

Agenda item 3 – Seismic activity scheduled for 2020-21

AFMA introduced the agenda item and asked the RAG to consider the schedule of planned seismic activity and the potential implications for recommendations under [agenda item 4](#).

The RAG noted the following:

- Seismic activity in the Bass Strait continues to be a major concern for the BSCZSF industry.
- The RAG and the Scallop Management Advisory Committee (ScallopMAC) have standing agenda items to consider scheduled seismic activity when providing advice on management arrangements, with a particular focus on closures and total allowable catch (TAC).
- A Senate inquiry into the impacts of seismic testing on fisheries and the marine environment is currently underway, the results were expected to be handed down by 14 May 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, however, this has been extended to the second sitting of 2021.
- AFMA ensures that any broad- scale impacts of offshore petroleum industry development on commercial fishing in Commonwealth waters are considered by:
 - providing comment directly to the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science on the annual acreage releases;
 - providing comment to petroleum companies on large scale proposals which may have a significant impact on a fishery; and
 - when requested, providing fine scale catch and effort data to petroleum companies and industry under a Deed of Confidentiality to assist the consultation process.

The RAG noted the following:

- There are currently no seismic surveys that are either open for comment, under assessment or approved by the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA) that overlap with previously surveyed beds in the BSCZSF.
- There is currently a 3-D marine seismic survey underway south of Lakes Entrance, which overlaps with historical scallop grounds. This survey is, however, 20 nm from the Flinders Island bed which was last surveyed in 2019.
- Beach Energy are in the process of planning a seismic survey that is in close proximity to the King Island Commercial scallop beds that, if approved, would occur sometime between July 2021 and July 2023.
- The two BSCZSF industry associations (BSSIA and Scallop Fishermen's Association of Tasmania) have written to Beach Energy requesting a detailed biomass survey of the area prior to any seismic survey taking place.
- The ScallopMAC Chair will be writing to the AFMA Commission on behalf of members outlining the concerns regarding planned seismic activity in the BSCZSF.
- A project to investigate the impact of seismic surveys on scallop larvae was supported by the RAG in 2019 for consideration by FRDC, but it is currently on hold pending the outcome of FRDC Project 'Oil and Gas: National coordination – seismic and other issues (2017-168)'.

The RAG made the following key point:

- The 3-D marine survey off Lakes Entrance could possibly have an impact on the recruitment of scallops in the BSCZSF, due to the potential connectivity between the Bass Strait and Victorian stocks.

Agenda item 4 – 2020 TACs, closures and season dates recommendations

AFMA introduced the agenda item and asked the RAG to provide advice to ScallopMAC and the AFMA Commission on TACs, closures, season dates and any other management arrangements for the BSCZSF 2020 fishing season. When making recommendations AFMA asked the RAG to consider:

- the summary of biomass survey information provided at [Agenda Item 2](#); and
- the intent of the [BSCZSF Harvest Strategy](#) (the Harvest Strategy) and the [Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy 2018](#) (HSP).

The RAG recalled its previous advice from the April 2020 meeting regarding the potential sustainability risks of not undertaking the 2020 biomass survey:

The results of recent biomass surveys show the stock is healthy, and recent catches are sustainable. The risk to sustainability of setting a Commercial Scallop TAC in the absence of a 2020 biomass survey is relatively low, and can be further mitigated by considering additional measures such as:

- *additional closures to protect biomass, with a particular focus on beds containing undersized scallops and recent recruitment;*
- *application of a TAC discount factor to account for the uncertainty in not having a recent biomass estimate;*
- *collecting in-season data as a means of monitoring for sudden changes in bed dynamics, including ageing or dying beds, and areas of new recruitment;*

- options outlined in the RAG paper to appropriately mitigate the risk of not having undertaken the 2020 biomass survey detailed below;
- at the request of the Commission, in-season triggers to detect and respond to declines in biomass in specific beds or across the fishery during the 2020 fishing season.

The RAG noted the following update from AFMA:

- The AFMA Commission supported cancelling the 2020 biomass survey due to the logistical and work health and safety issues arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The AFMA Commission agreed, in- principle, to determine the 2020 TAC for Commercial scallops outside the requirements of the Harvest Strategy.
- The 2019 Commercial scallop TAC was set at 3,897 t, of which 2,931 t (75%) was caught.
- While the Harvest Strategy allows for a TAC for Doughboy Scallops to be determined at different levels each year, they are not targeted and the default TAC of 100 t is typically applied. No Doughboy Scallops have been landed since 2017.

The RAG noted the following overview of the management framework:

- The HSP provides a framework for applying an evidence based, precautionary and transparent approach to setting harvest levels in Commonwealth fisheries.
- The objective of the HSP is the ecologically sustainable and profitable use of Australia's Commonwealth commercial fisheries resources (where ecological sustainability takes priority) through implementation of harvest strategies.
- The Harvest Strategy achieves the objective of the HSP by implementing a tiered approach to setting TACs and closures based on the results of independent biomass surveys.
- The intent of the Harvest Strategy is to maintain the stock at sustainable levels by closing sufficient areas of the fishery that contain a high density of scallops that are large enough to spawn effectively (i.e. greater than 85 mm) to promote recruitment, and allow for the remaining areas to be fished within a sustainable TAC.

2020 Total Allowable Catch

AFMA Management requested the RAG consider either rolling over the 2019 Commercial scallop TAC of 4000 t or applying a precautionary discount factor to the 2019 TAC; and roll over the 100 t TAC for Doughboy Scallops.

In formulating its advice, the RAG noted the following:

- AFMA has a legislative requirement to pursue sustainable and economically efficient fisheries, and to the extent possible, RAG advice should be evidenced based.
- While there is a time-series of biomass survey results, there is a paucity of economic data with which to formulate TAC advice. Typically, the Maximum Economic Yield (MEY) is at a harvest rate lower than the Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).
- The scallop fishery has a history of rapid biomass crashes, and a conservative approach to setting the TAC should be considered for 2020. In particular, many of the previously surveyed beds are ageing, and recruitment appears to be localised.
- There is a large amount of uncertainty in the 2020 scallop fishing season, in particular whether there will be sufficient workforce to process the catch and whether a profitable market will be available.
- While the Harvest Strategy allows for a TAC for Doughboy Scallops to be determined at different levels each year, they are not targeted and the default TAC of 100 t is typically applied. No Doughboy Scallops have been landed since 2017.

Area closures

AFMA Management requested the RAG consider either rolling over the 2019 area closures or implementing new or additional closures for the 2020 fishing season.

In formulating its advice, the RAG noted the following:

- During the 2019 fishing season, Flinders Island (FI), Apollo Bay 1 (AB1), King Island Blue Dot Extended (KIBDE), King Island 7 (KI7) were formally closed, and the JH bed was voluntarily closed.
- In the absence of an updated biomass survey, the precautionary approach would be to maintain the 2019 closures, rather than implementing a new series of closures.
- The 2019 biomass survey indicated that the King Island 6 (KI6) bed has a high density of spawning scallops. There are currently no closures in the region directly north-east of King Island, and closing the KI6 bed may promote localised recruitment.
- The JH bed contains juvenile scallops, and industry have reported the bed extends further than what was surveyed in 2019. This bed should be considered as a formal closure with an extension to the mapped boundary.
- Industry members did not raise any concerns with the proposal to include the JH and KI6 beds as closures for the 2020 season.

Season dates

AFMA Management requested the RAG provide advice on any sustainability risks of either rolling over the 2019 fishing season dates (12 July 2020 - 31 December 2020) or opening the fishery on 1 June 2020, to be closed on 31 December 2020.

In formulating its advice, the RAG noted the following:

- AFMA has received mixed advice from industry in relation to the opening dates for the 2020 season. Some have requested that the season commence on 1 June to provide industry flexibility. Others have expressed concerns regarding an earlier season opening, suggesting there would be an over-supply of poor quality scallops which may impact market prices.
- It was suggested the risk of over-supply is mitigated by operators and processors working together to only meet market demand, and poor quality scallops would not be landed.
- Historical data shows that scallop condition is often poor in June and early July, and the impact of trawling over areas of underdeveloped scallops on spawning success is unknown.
- In previous years, up to 150 t of scallops is allowed to be harvested in June, however this immediately follows the biomass survey which allows industry to target known areas of higher quality scallop. This is unknown for the 2020 season and there is some risk in searching for scallops.
- The RAG did not support a June 1 season opening because of the potential impact on underdeveloped scallops, but considered the following options for season start dates (noting industry members did not vote due to potential conflicts of interest):

12 July - considered to be the more risk-averse approach in the absence of a survey, and potentially lower market demand due to Covid-19 (supported by four RAG members)

1 July – allows some operators to fish earlier and gradually introduce product to the market (supported by two RAG members)

Recommendations

Noting the advice above, the RAG recommended the following:

- A 2020 Commercial scallop TAC of 3000 t (with no step up) and a Doughboy scallop TAC of 100 t.
- Roll over closures from the 2019 season with the addition of KI6 and JH bed extended.
- Open the 2020 season on either 1 July or 12 July, with the consensus being 12 July.

Those who declared an interest with this agenda item left the phone call while the RAG formulated their recommendations and were provided with the final recommendations when they re-joined the teleconference.

In- season triggers

AFMA Management requested that the RAG provide advice on collecting in-season data and setting triggers to detect and respond to declines in biomass in specific beds or across the fishery during the 2020 fishing season.

In formulating its advice, the RAG noted the following:

- In-season triggers should be based on the collection of robust data, with a clear management response. In the case of the scallop fishery, management responses would either be a decrease in the TAC or additional closures.
- A step up TAC had previously been used in this fishery, but it was considered overly complicated. In recent years the RAG has opted to set a single TAC.
- It is unknown whether the BSSIA FRDC project can provide meaningful data during the 2020 fishing season, and the collection of any 'ad-hoc' data throughout the season is unlikely to be used to inform management decisions.
- The Harvest Strategy includes voluntary industry closures where discard rates indicate a bed contains juvenile scallops.

Overall, the RAG was of the opinion that TAC and closures recommended by the RAG provide a sufficient level of precaution, and that additional triggers were not necessary.

Close of meeting

The Chair thanked the RAG for their contribution to the meeting and wished industry all the best in the fishing season.

The meeting was closed at 2.11pm

Attachment A- register of interest

Name	Membership	Declared interests
Brendan Kelaher	Chair	No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Nic Marton	Scientific	ABARES employee. Organisation is known to submit research funding application for consideration by ScallopRAG
Jayson Semmens	Scientific	Scallop Research Group Leader, Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies. Organisation is known to submit research funding applications for consideration by ScallopRAG
Stuart Richey	Industry	Holds Commonwealth and State concessions.
John Cull	Industry	Holds Commonwealth and State concessions.
Mervi Kangas	Scientific	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, WA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Julian Morison	Economic	Director, Kuti Co Pty Ltd – SA Pipi quota holder, Director, BDO Advisory (SA) Pty Ltd - current contracts with SA & Qld state governments collecting fisheries economic data, providing economic advice; Member, SA Snapper Management Advisory Committee (PIRSA), Economics member, Shark Resource Assessment Group (AFMA), Member, Economics Working Group (AFMA), Member, Human Dimensions Research subprogram Steering Committee (FRDC), Principal & coinvestigator on several FRDC research projects
Dan Corrie	AFMA member	AFMA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Heather Johnston	Executive Officer	AFMA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Matt Koopman	Observer, Fishwell Consulting	Fishwell Consulting. Have undertaken the BSCZSF since 2015. Submit research funding applications and undertake research projects for Commonwealth, State and International fisheries agencies and other organisations including fishery associations and private companies. Engaged by SETFIA to report to numerous seismic exploration companies on fishing catch, effort and value that takes overlaps with the proposed seismic testing areas. This included catch and effort from the BSCZSF. A slightly related project is looking at the effects of the seismic survey off east Gippsland on Danish seine catches. No interest in any commercial fisheries.
Andrew Sullivan	Invited Participant, Industry	Executive Officer, Bass Strait Scallop Industry Association

Attachment B



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery Resource Assessment Group (ScallopRAG)

Meeting 35 – 11 May 2020

Agenda

Time (EDT): 11.00-14.45

Approximate time	Item
11.00	Agenda item 1. Preliminaries 1.1 Welcome and apologies 1.2 Declaration of interests 1.3 Adoption of agenda 1.4 Actions arising from previous meetings
11.15	Agenda item 2. Summary of information available for scallop beds surveyed <i>Fishwell Consulting to present a summary of information available for BSCZSF scallop beds surveyed 2015- 2019</i>
12.15	Agenda item 5. Other Business <i>BSSIA Executive officer to give an update on FRDC in- season data collection project</i>
12.30	Agenda item 3. Seismic activity schedule for 2020-21 <i>ScallopRAG to consider the schedule of planned seismic activity and if there are any implications for the closures proposed under agenda item 4</i>
13.15	Agenda item 4. 2020 TACs, closures and season dates recommendations <i>ScallopRAG to develop advice for ScallopMAC and the AFMA Commission for the 2020 TACs, closures and season dates</i>
14.45	Close

Attachment B- register of interest

Name	Membership	Declared interests
Brendan Kelaher	Chair	No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Nic Marton	Scientific	ABARES employee. Organisation is known to submit research funding application for consideration by ScallopRAG
Jayson Semmens	Scientific	Scallop Research Group Leader, Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies. Organisation is known to submit research funding applications for consideration by ScallopRAG
Stuart Richey	Industry	Holds Commonwealth and State concessions.
John Cull	Industry	Holds Commonwealth and State concessions.
Mervi Kangas	Scientific	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, WA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Julian Morison	Economic	Director, Kuti Co Pty Ltd – SA Pipi quota holder, Director, BDO Advisory (SA) Pty Ltd - current contracts with SA & Qld state governments collecting fisheries economic data, providing economic advice; Member, SA Snapper Management Advisory Committee (PIRSA), Economics member, Shark Resource Assessment Group (AFMA), Member, Economics Working Group (AFMA), Member, Human Dimensions Research subprogram Steering Committee (FRDC), Principal & coinvestigator on several FRDC research projects
Dan Corrie	AFMA member	AFMA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Heather Johnston	Executive Officer	AFMA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Matt Koopman	Observer, Fishwell Consulting	Fishwell Consulting. Have undertaken the BSCZSF since 2015. Submit research funding applications and undertake research projects for Commonwealth, State and International fisheries agencies and other organisations including fishery associations and private companies. Engaged by SETFIA to report to numerous seismic exploration companies on fishing catch, effort and value that takes overlaps with the proposed seismic testing areas. This included catch and effort from the BSCZSF. A slightly related project is looking at the effects of the seismic survey off east Gippsland on Danish seine catches. No interest in any commercial fisheries.
Andrew Sullivan	Invited Participant, Industry	Executive Officer, Bass Strait Scallop Industry Association

Attachment C- Status of actions

RAG meeting #	Agenda Item	Action item #	Action Item	Agency/ person	Timeframe	Progress
32	10	4	AFMA to prepare a discussion paper regarding the harvest strategy review for consideration by the RAG at its June 2020 meeting.	AFMA	June meeting	To be considered at June meeting
33	5	1	AFMA to re-draft the principles of prioritising survey beds document to capture the key discussion points	AFMA	June meeting	To be considered at June meeting
33	6	2	AFMA to write to operators to remind them to complete logbook information regarding size and tonnage of discarded scallops.	AFMA	Start of 2020 season	To be completed
33	6	3	Fishwell Consulting to correct confidence interval on JH bed	Fishwell Consulting	Next meeting	To be completed
33	6	4	AFMA to include an additional principle for prioritising surveyed beds based on recruitment, proximity of commercial fishing and biomass in the prioritisation principles document.	AFMA	June meeting	To be considered at June meeting